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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER CONDEMN JEWISH CEMETERY VANDALISM
NEAR VILNIUS

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Vandals tore down 22 monuments at a Jewish cemetery in Vilnius on June 24. President Valdas Adamkus, acting Prime Minister Zigmantas Balcytis, and Vilnius City mayor Arturas Zuokas publicly condemned the desecration and urged local law enforcement to find and punish the perpetrators. The city administration promised financial assistance for restoration of the monuments, and the police have launched an investigation. The letter that our Mission sent condemning this act of intolerance to Jewish Community leader Simonas Alperavicius received national media attention. End summary.

VANDALS DESECRATE JEWISH CEMETERY

¶2. (U) Vandals damaged 22 tombstones and other memorials at the Jewish cemetery in the Suderve District of Vilnius County on the night of June 24. Alperavicius told journalists he believes that the vandalism could be related to the June 23, 1941, uprising in Kaunas, when anti-Soviet resistance carried out the first killings of local Jews. Vilnius police launched a pre-trial investigation, but have not identified any suspects.

HEADS OF STATE REACT PROMPTLY, CITY PROMISES SUPPORT

¶3. (U) President Valdas Adamkus, acting Prime Minister Zigmantas Balcytis, and the Civil Democracy Party reacted quickly and decisively to the cemetery's desecration. President Adamkus issued a statement condemning the act of vandalism and expressing his regret that "there are people in Lithuania who dare to desecrate the memory of the deceased." Acting PM Balcytis also expressed condolence to the local Jewish community in a public statement, saying "vandals trampled not only the memory of the deceased, but also common human values that band together nations and communities. It is painful that the grave of a local Jewish scholar who explored and enshrined Lithuanian language was also damaged." Vilnius Mayor Arturas Zuokas also issued a public statement expressing his outrage at the act and promising to provide financial support to restore the damaged monuments.

¶4. (U) The CDA sent a letter to Alperavicius on June 28 expressing regret for the fact that the vandalism occurred and calling on Lithuanians to promote tolerance and openness. The letter also applauded the Lithuanian leaders who publicly condemned the vandalism and expressed admiration for the many Lithuanians who uphold the principles of tolerance and ethnic diversity. The Mission publicized the letter in a press release. The wire service BNS, Lithuanian National Radio, a leading daily newspaper (Kauno Diena), TV3's national evening news, and the web portal Omni all reported the letter on June 30 and July 1. The Embassy's message reached an audience of approximately 500,000 through these media

outlets.

COMMENT: AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE TOLERANCE

15. (SBU) This sad event appears to be an isolated outbreak of vandalism rather than a sign of rising anti-Semitism. Lithuania has not witnessed a Jewish cemetery desecration on this scale for several years. Our Mission intentionally delayed release of its statement to allow Lithuanian leaders enough time to respond appropriately -- which they did. Their responses were decisive and poignant, providing the GOL with an opportunity to highlight the need for greater tolerance in Lithuanian society.

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